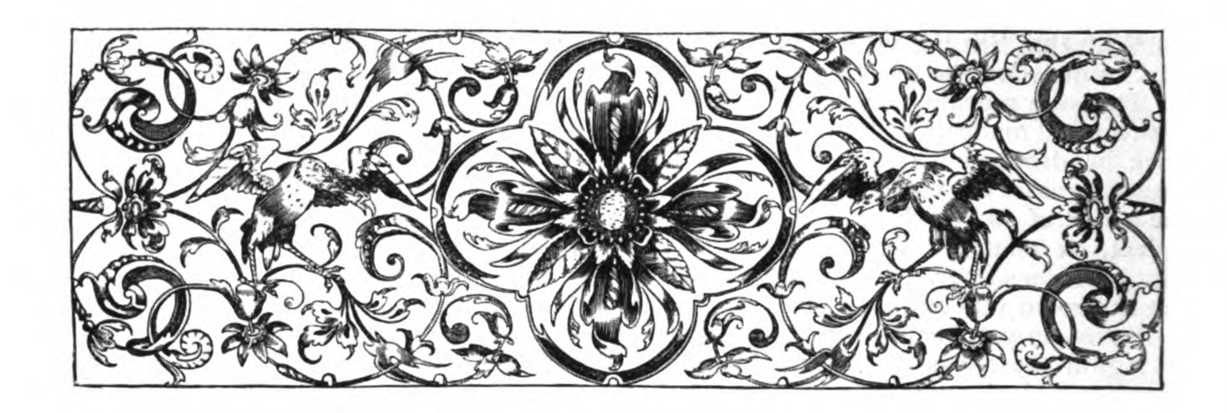
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TWO AFRICAN CITIES.

By HAROLD CRICHTON-BROWNE.

With Illustrations from Photographs.



MY first view of Rabat was from the sea on the morning of April 7, 1888. The engines of the good ship *Empusa*, on which my chief, Mr. Thomson, and I were passengers to Mogador stopped, and I crawled on deck to breathe the early air. All prospect of landing, however, vanished when I saw the long huge waves sweeping past, and dismay took the place of hope when it was announced that it was too rough for the lighters to come alongside the ship, and that we must steam about the bay till the sea settled down. And steam about the bay we did during the whole of that day and next night, but the sea manifested no disposition to settle down, and so at the end of twenty-four hours we resumed our onward voyage without having landed any cargo.

When I next caught sight of Rabat six months later, on my return journey by land, it presented to my eyes a very different appearance. It was about noon on a brilliant day in October. The atmosphere was so full of sunshine that there was no room for wind, and everything basked silently in the golden glory. And there in the distance, planted on an eminence rising out of a country covered with vines, and olives, and orange groves and gardens, surrounded by a battlemented wall, and with the sea gleaming beyond, stood the prettiest and most picturesque town in Morocco, except, perhaps, Azemour and Demnat.

I left Mr. Thomson at Casablanca; or rather, he left me there, being suddenly recalled to England to take command of an Emin Pasha Relief Expedition which was then in contemplation. With an interpreter and a party of seven men—Moors, Jews, and negroes—I journeyed along the coast, a distance of sixty miles, till I neared the town where I was to wait for some days for letters and instructions before starting for Meequinez and the interior.

On our way we passed a number of wayfarers, unusual on a Moorish highway, and many mules and camels laden with wool, maize, millet, and skins for exportation, and English cottons French sugars and candles for the inland towns. Besides the traders, we saw many peasants belonging to the Zemmúr and Benì Hassen tribes, as ill-looking fellows as are to be seen in Barbary, and two or three ladies of rank on their travels, one the sister of the Kaid of Rabat, who had a number of attendants and was seated astride a mule and clothed in a blue *hadoon* and white linen face-cloth.

Rabat stands on a cliff of red and gray sandstone on the left or southern bank of the river Bouregrag where it flows into the sea, and with its shining white walls and cupolas, inclosed orchards, commanding Kasba, tall minaret, and noble tower of Hassen it presents, as viewed from any side, a striking and attractive aspect. It was founded in the year 1190 A.D. by the Sultan Yacoub El Mansor, who designed it as a place of arms, but, with the enlightenment of a Moorish potentate of the period, aimed at making it at the same time a centre of commerce and a seat of learning. Here he built a castle, fortifications, and barracks, and also markets and shops, temples and

colleges, and here he speedily attracted crowds of merchants, artizans, and scholars, by an edict which, if not in accordance with the strict rules of political economy, seems to

BABEL SELAH BENAT, SALLEE.

have served the ends he had in view—an edict which ordained that every man in the new town, according to his trade and occupation, should receive a yearly stipend. The growth of Rabat under the fostering hand of the Sultan El Mansor must have been prodigious, but its prosperity was short-lived, for after his death it fell into rapid decay,

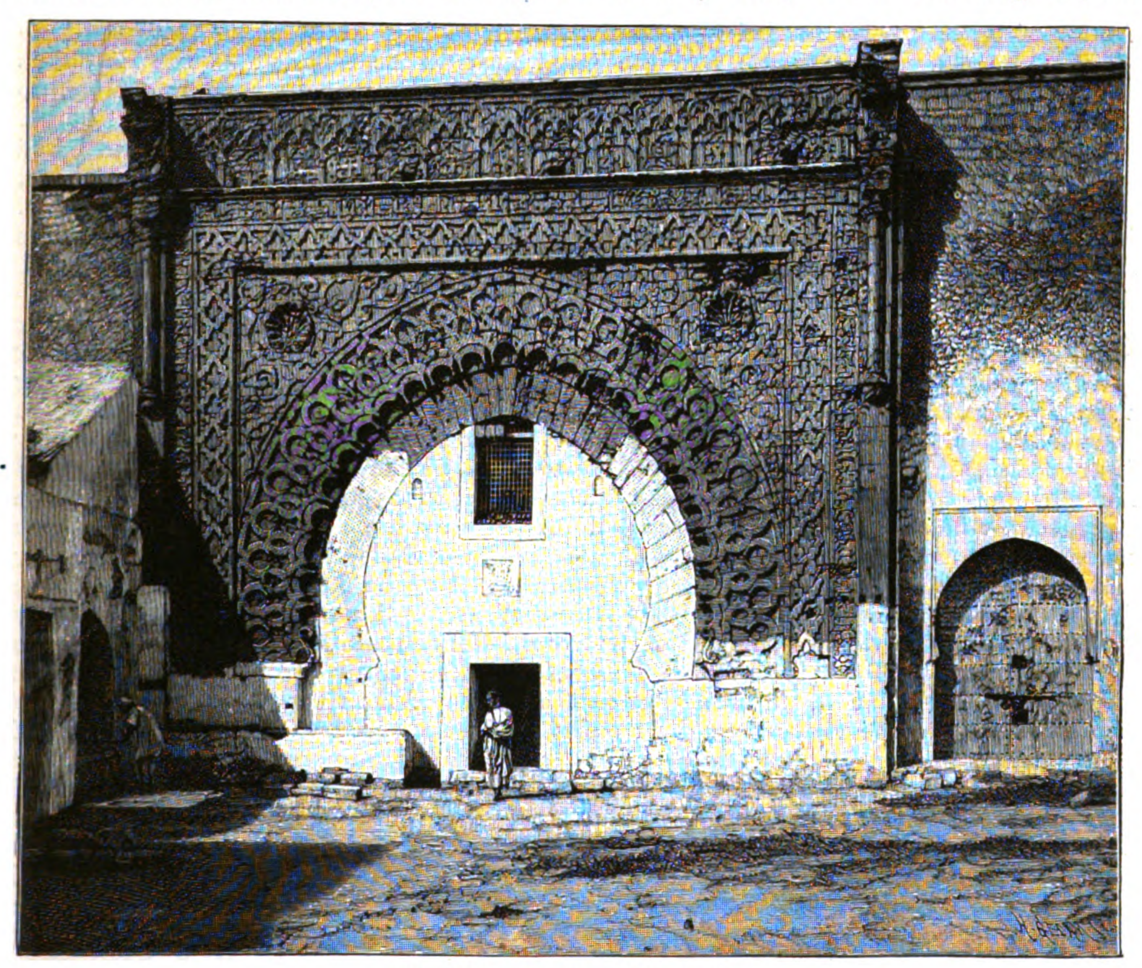
and that at the end of the fifteenth century scarce the tenth part of it remained. Still, however, even at the present day, Rabat continues to be a place of considerable consequence. It contains a population which may be estimated at not less than 26,000, while Sallee, which, although on the opposite side of the river, is practically a part of it, contains 10,000.

Sallee possesses few objects of interest. There is a battery mounted with obsolete guns facing the sea, a redoubt at the entrance to the river, and a huge, dark, gruesome dungeon, in which Christian captives brought in by pirates were, in former days, huddled together, until they were sent up the country. A wall three feet thick surrounds the town, in which are two fine arched gateways, the Babel Ansera and the Babel Selah Benat. But the houses are small, the streets straight, and the bazaars inferior to those of Rabat.

The fortifications of Rabat, which are said to have been rebuilt by an English renegade in 1772, but give indications of much more recent repairs, and the batteries overlooking the sea are mounted with guns of various descriptions, some of Portuguese make, some hailing from Gibraltar at a remote date, and some comparatively modern. The Kasba, or citadel, is a large square structure with encircling walls close to the sea, in connection with which are some remarkable bomb-proof magazines and vaults, and a gateway of rare beauty, formed of an arch of a horse-shoe shape slightly pointed, which, as well as the wall above and around, is ornamented with graceful arabesques cut in sandstone, and retaining great sharpness of outline. The cemetery near the sea presents no special feature of interest, except that there are littered about in it a few bones, which have rather a revolting appearance. The edict prohibiting the exportation of bones which was in force in Morocco a few years ago has been withdrawn, and now considerable quantities, in which it is suspected those of the faithful mingle somewhat largely with those of the dumb companions of their toil and victims of their appetite, are sent out of the country. Burials in Morocco are shallow affairs, and dogs and jackals have resurrectionary tendencies, and when they have done their work it is not to be wondered at that the Moors should endeavour to make a little profit out of the osseous relicts of their countrymen, more especially as it is dangerous to leave human bones lying about in Morocco. A horrible superstition exists in Morocco that there is no surer way of injuring an enemy than by administering to him some dead man's bones. These have therefore been sometimes ground down and mixed with bread, cake, or kuskussu, and so given to the objects of hatred or jealousy, with the invariable result, it is alleged, that effects resembling those of the evil eye are produced. The man or woman who has partaken of the bones grows wan and thin, suffers from a complication of maladies, and finally dwindles away.

I made repeated inquiries for the Sultan's Palace, and was directed to a large, unsightly building like a barrack, situated outside the walls and to the south of the town, which is used, I was assured, by his Shereefian Majesty on his periodical journeys between Fez and Morocco; but that was not the palace of which I was in search, for it was of no great antiquity. It was only after many cross-questions and crooked answers—for my stock of Arabic was limited—and much hurrying to and fro, that I was at last guided to what is really a ruin in the heart of the town—a ruin with crumbling pillars, broken arches, roofless chambers, and grass-grown floors, but a noble ruin, and the palace of my quest. And why, it may be asked, was I so filled with anxiety to see this particular ruin? Because it was the scene of a transaction of which every Englishman feels proud—the startling achievement of Whittington's cat. The spirit of modern scepticism has of course thrown doubt on that incident. Attempts have been made to show that Whittington, instead of being a poor boy from Lancashire, was the son of a Gloucestershire knight; that he was never a scullion or turned a spit under the persecutions of a vindictive cook; that he never ran away, to be recalled from Highgate Hill by the prophetic chiming of Bow Bells; and that the story of his cat is a bit of folk-lore told of many different persons in different regions of the world, and in some inexplicable way tagged on to the biography of a wealthy and benevolent Lord Mayor. But for my part I prefer the testimony of the ancient chap-books to the cavillings of to-day, and shall always implicitly believe the story of Dick Whittington as it was told me in my earliest years by thoroughly veracious persons, who made it a rule to punish lying with the utmost severity. Nothing shall disabuse my

mind of the belief that Whittington had a cat, a black and white one, bought for a penny, which freed him from rats and mice in his garret, and which, being his only possession, he ventured forth in his master, Hugh Fitz Warren's, ship. Nothing shall make me doubt that that ship—the *Unicorn*—driven by contrary winds to the utmost coast of Barbary, anchored at Rabat, and there exchanged hatchets, knives, looking-glasses, and kerzies for gold, which was more plentiful there than lead and copper in England. And above all, nothing shall shake my conviction that the captain of the *Unicorn*, being bidden by the king to a banquet at which rats and mice held high festival as well as men, sent for the cat, which destroyed the vermin, delighting the Court by its noble sport, and was purchased for great store of jewels and pearls, which enriched the virtuous Dick, and enabled him to marry Alice, his master's daughter, and



ARCHWAY IN THE KASBA, RABAT.

enter on his successful mercantile career. Why, the internal evidences of truthfulness in the old narrative are, to my mind, convincing. Is not the king described as sitting cross-legged, just as eminent Moors do to this day, on a rich carpet, one of the kind no doubt, for which Rabat is still famous? and were not the movements of the cat compared to those of the lion, of which there was great plenty in the country at that time? Then have I not seen the very place where the whole affair occurred, and am I not able to testify that vermin abound in Rabat to this hour? It would be an inestimable blessing to that town and district, and indeed to all Morocco, could Miss Ormerod send out a predatory insect with a taste that might diminish a most pestilent pest, or could M. Pasteur supply some kind of flea cholera that might be let loose to plague an intolerable plague. I have often thought when in Morocco that the sum of the suffering caused by the small ills of life amounts to more in the long run than that caused by great calamities. Cuts in shaving perhaps in the centuries cause more pain than wounds in battle, and certain it is that the bites of fleas occasion far more distress in Morocco than those of serpents and wild beasts of all descriptions.

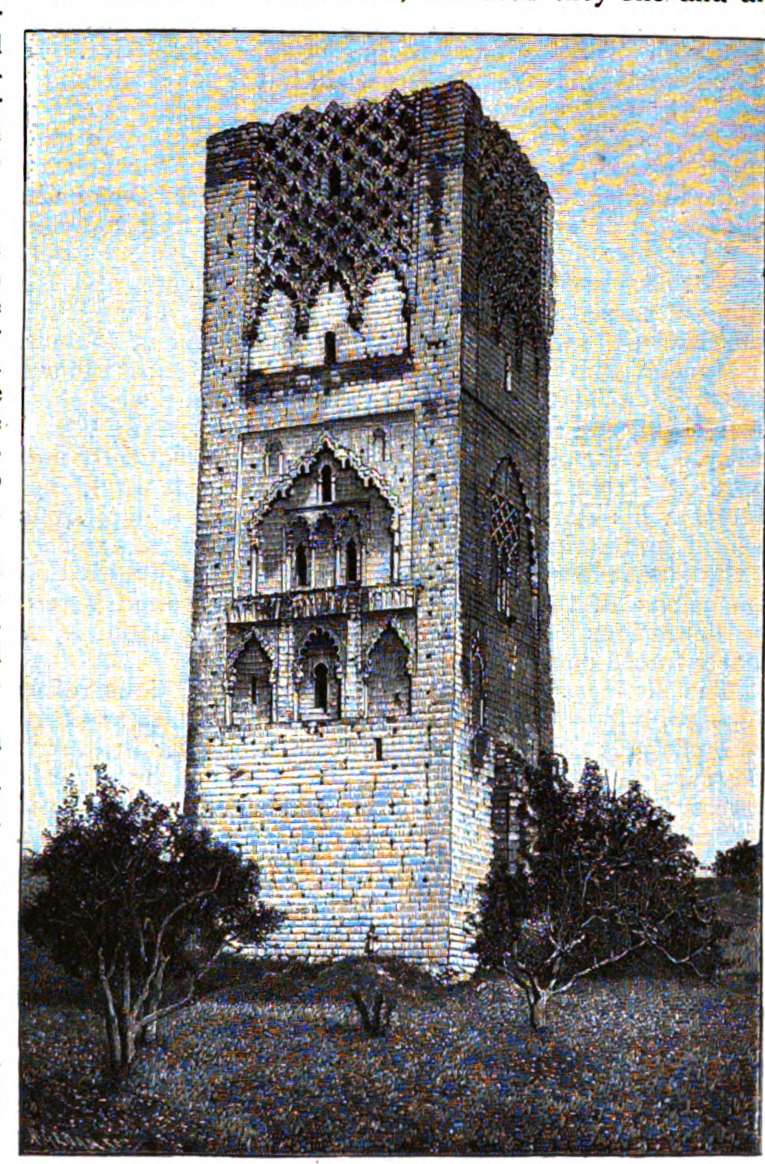
Rats and mice too cause great and grievous depredations. I can well understand what a priceless blessing the first cat imported must have been.

Reflections like these passed through my mind as I gazed on the dilapidated hall in the old palace of Rabat, which was once also the University or Endarsa of the town, but I speedily recalled myself to admire the beauty of the pillars and colonnades of this fine building, and then to stumble down a narrow and precipitous street to the water-port, where some boats were moored. There, however, I was again instantly plunged into the mists of history, for standing on the rude quay and looking at the terraces of Sallee opposite it flashed upon me that it was on this very spot that Robinson Crusoe stood when brought in a captive by the Moorish pirates. While still a youth, it will be recollected, and on his second voyage between the Canary Islands and the African shore, Crusoe was after a brisk engagement taken prisoner by a party of Rovers, who carried him to Sallee, where instead of being forwarded up country like his shipmates, he had the good luck to be retained as the captain's proper prize, and from which he ultimately made his escape in a fishing boat, to discover that true Treasure Island that has enriched the boyhood of most of us. Before Crusoe's time the Sallee Rovers were the scourge of Christendom, and had become so truculent as to revolt from their allegiance to their Sultan, Muley Zidan, who thereupon entered into a treaty with Charles I. of England for their destruction. A squadron of English ships of war was sent to lie before the town of Sallee while the Moorish forces attacked it by land, and the result was that it was soon reduced, its fortifications demolished, and the piratical leaders put to death. But the resuscitation of Sallee, and its relapse into its old evil ways, as well as the re-establishment of an understanding between it and its Emperor, must have speedily taken place for in a few years its banditti were again found sweeping the Mediterranean and paying a regular tribute of money and Christian slaves to the Court at Morocco. The marvel is that such a handful of robbers in a den which could have been so easily destroyed should have been allowed to go on so long inflicting terrible injuries on all the maritime nations of Europe, most of which even stooped to pay tribute to secure a precarious immunity from their attacks. As late as the middle of the eighteenth century, we read that it was no uncommon thing for Sallee Rovers to lie off Lundy Isle and pounce on passing Bristol merchantmen. And the final suppression of these desperadoes came not from the indignation of civilized nations, but from purely internal causes. A difficulty in collecting tribute induced Sidi Mahomet, soon after the middle of the last century to subdue Rabat and Sallee with a strong hand, while the gradual accumulation of the sand-bar at the mouth of the river Bouregrag rendered it impossible for the Rovers to float ships of a size equal to cope with those of European nations, which owing to growing skill in workmanship and mechanical appliances, were steadily increasing in tonnage. At one time the Emperor's armed frigates used to enter the Bouregrag and be laid up there for the winter. Then came a time when owing to accumulations at the bar they had to be unloaded of their guns before doing so. And now there are only seven or eight feet of water in the channel at ordinary high tides. This choking up of the river mouth, while it helped to abolish the water thieves, has had a disastrous effect on legitimate trade. Only very light drafted vessels can visit the port, and in the summer months, and captains have often to submit to pay lighterage as well as suffer detention. As Rabat is the proper port for Meequinez and Fez, as well as for a rich district of country well populated adjacent to it, the clearing away of this bar must be one of the first duties of a reformed Moorish Government.

In my wanderings about Rabat I came on the prison, a capacious block, hideous enough, but less prison-like than similar establishments are in European towns from the mere lack of contrast, for all the neighbouring houses had outside walls as blank and windowless as it. This prison at Rabat was the scene some time ago of an unusual occurrence. A party of prisoners confined in it, despairing of release in course of law or by the Sultan's clemency, resolved to effect their escape if possible, and decided to do so by boring a hole under the outer wall of the prison. Being much left to themselves—their stick-bearing jailers only visiting them now and then to maintain discipline by a few impartially-distributed strokes—they had plenty of time for unobserved sapping and mining, which they carried on with cautious diligence. Every day a little earth was removed, and this was carried out of the prison by their wives and women in the dishes in



which they brought them their food. At the times of their jailer's visits the mouth of the hole was covered by a mat, on which a sick man was laid. Slowly and laboriously the work proceeded, and at last the tunnel was driven right under the wall to the other side, where only a thin covering of earth was left to conceal it. And even then the prisoners behaved with remarkable self-restraint. There was no hurried scramble to get out, no selfish anticipation of the general plan. They waited patiently until a day came when the prison officers absented themselves to attend a *fête* in honour of one of the Sultan's victories over a rebel tribe, and then they one and all quietly decamped. Their elopement when discovered was peculiarly aggravating to the authorities, for amongst them was a kaid who had offered an enormous ransom to the Sultan, which had been refused in the expectation that a little more pressure would insure a still higher bid, so large rewards were offered for their recapture, and in a few days all but one were brought in. And then the soldiers took cruel vengeance on the women who had aided and abetted them in prison-breaking, beating them with severity, and burning down the miserable huts in which they lived outside the walls and worked to earn a scanty maintenance.



SMA-HASSEN TOWER, RABAT.

Riding through the town and out of the southern gate, we met a gang of prisoners—rebels—on their way to Rabat prison, chained together by heavy iron hoops round their necks, and guarded by a strong escort of soldiers. They were footsore and weary with their long march, lank from insufficient nourishment, and stolid from brutal indifference or haggard from despair. An empty hoop dangling here and there showed when one more feeble and forlorn, or perhaps more fortunate than the others, had succumbed on the way. When this happens the head of the exhausted wretch is cut off and cast aside, and the line then freed from encumbrance is enabled to resume its march. The procession of prisoners and their guards was terribly painful to contemplate. The next sight that greeted us was of a more lively description, consisting of a crowd of people occupying the pretty outer market-place, in the midst of which stands a broken pillar, bargaining for oxen, horses, vegetables, and all sorts of wares, out of which I picked some pieces of embroidery of brilliant colours, audaciously but agreeably combined. Leaving the Soko or market-place, round which we had ridden to the consternation and irritation of the natives who freely blasphemed our prancing steeds, we held our way, down the side of the town wall and along the high left bank of the river which is

festooned with charming gardens, and turning to the right down a narrow lane, along which we had to go gingerly, for it was hedged with prickly pears, arrived at the foot of the Sma-Hassen. It is a superb structure and although in parts unfinished and damaged by lightning is still lordly and beautiful. Built of hewn stone, brought from Spain and by the hands of Christian captives, and 180 feet from base to summit, it presents on the outside, three tiers of large and elegant arches over comparatively small windows, and above the topmost arch a deep honeycomb of exquisite carving. It is most ornate in the North side or that facing Rabat. The work of the same architect as the Kutubia at Morocco city, and the Giralda at Seville, it has some features in common with both of these and others that are distinctive. It lacks the lanthorn of the Kutubia and is less rich in fretwork, but it has a simple grandeur of proportion, that is peculiarly its own and very impressive. The ascent of the tower is made not by stairs, but by a series of inclined planes, up which a horse might be ridden, but not I am bound to add, three horses abreast as Leo Africanus asserts. The lowest of these inclined planes which are made of a concrete of lime and sand, very hard and durable was broken away in the time of the emperor Sidi Mahomet, and by his order, so that now a ladder has to be used before a footing can be got. As the ascent is made a number of spacious stone chambers, chill, solemn, and tenantless, except by owls and bats, are passed, and when the top is reached, a magnificent view is obtained of Rabat and Sallee, the winding Bouregrag, the forest of Mamora and the restless Atlantic. El Mansor, who designed the tower as he did most other notable things in and around Rabat, intended it not merely as the stately sentinel of the great mosque, but as a lookout station, and as a beacon for ships at sea. In the latter capacity it is still of great utility. In the summer months heavy fogs frequently muffle the low country near the shore at Rabat and when these clear away it would be difficult for the seamen to ascertain his exact position on that sandy and dangerous coast which is destitute of natural landmarks, but for the Sma-Hassen which towers conspicuously. The ruins of the great mosque are adjacent. An idea of its greatness may be derived from the dimensions of the large *mitifere*, or underground cistern, which supplied water for the lustrations of the worshippers who frequented it, and which can even now be clearly traced out.

The dirtiness of the Jews is a subject of pious reflection with most travellers in Morocco, but erroneous notions on the subject are sometimes promulgated. No doubt the Mellah[1] is dirtier than the Moorish quarter in every town in Morocco, but, then, one must remember the restrictions under which the Jews live. They are cooped up in a confined space having gates locked on them at fixed hours, and are not allowed the benefit of such rude systems of scavengering as exist. They could not be clean if they would, at least as regards the removal of refuse, and it is remarkable, that however disgusting the streets and courts of the Mellah may be, the interiors of the houses are, as a rule, as well swept and garnished as any Moorish dwelling. Then if the Jews in Morocco were dirtier by nature than the Moors, the circumstances under which they have existed for centuries should be borne in mind. They have been so isolated and persecuted, driven into holes, and shut up in noisome prisons, that it has not been in their power to be dainty in their habits, and it would be little to be wondered at, had slovenliness become ingrained in their composition. They are never allowed the benefit of those extenuating circumstances which are invariably pleaded in connection with the shortcomings and delinquencies of other peoples, but are held up to hatred and contempt. The wonder is that the Jews of Morocco retain a particle of energy or self-respect. Their resistance to degenerative influences is astonishing, as any one would admit who had walked with me through the Mellah in Rabat and seen three lovely girls, evidently sisters—short, but well formed, with regular features and large languishing eyes—who issued from the door of one of the houses, as we passed. I have received much disinterested kindness from Jews in Morocco, and I should ill requite it if I did not protest against the indiscriminate abuse that is often heaped upon them.

[1] The Jewish quarter.

